NEWS ROOM

ISSUE 5: MUSIC

Table of Contents

The Soundtrack Syndrome
illesha Khandelwal
3

Sound Sessions
Liam Annis
4

Dropping the Bass on EDM
Stephanie Chang
6

All That Jazz
Ashleigh Tait
8

As a Sparrow Chirps, So Does She
Lena Mirisola
10

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The Soundtrack Syndrome

Words by illesha Khandelwal

Do you ever find yourself in a particularly dramatic moment and realize that there's this song playing in your head, and it fits perfectly with what's happening, and if only everyone could hear it, the moment would be perfect? Well, I decided that it's about time we had a phrase for this feeling. So I coined one. Ladies and gentlemen, it is called "The Soundtrack Syndrome".

Sometimes we get really bored with our mundane, banal, existential, pointless lives and decide to spend time, time that we could be spending running in slow motion through sunflower fields, placed in front of an artificially lit screen of moving pixels until our eyes water and we're deaf to the world. We watch movies. And sometimes these movies suck so bad you wish you hadn't watched them – here's looking at you (not so) Epic Movie. But sometimes, just sometimes, they stir something deep inside of you; feelings you didn't know you had, things you didn't know you ever wanted, memories you had almost let slip away. And, let me preach to you, the reason for these feelings is probably a carefully chosen soundtrack.

Let's take, for example, the most obvious of them all – the kiss. Your romantic interest is looking at you all dewy eyed in a low light setting and you lean in to kiss them – and ever so subtly you hear the words "I know who I want to take me home" and suddenly Semisonic's got you feeling all kinds of feels that you weren't feeling before "Closing Time" spontaneously played from the heavens. These fantastical moments reveal an idealization so heavily present in cinematic culture.

The important question here, is – is this idealization healthy? Or are we using visuals and music to create impossible scenarios, Arcadias of a sort, that consumers can only dream of experiencing? Is this culture of 'the perfect moment' actually taking away from our real life events?

According to James Kellaris, an expert on influences of music on consumers, there is such a thing as an "earworm" which is a song that gets stuck in your head because of a "cognitive itch" triggered by repetitive patterns and rhythms. Researchers still don't have a complete understanding of why this happens; the human psyche is just too complex to fully explain! Movies, specifically, are the perfect situation to get a song stuck in your head. They build up the perfect mood for the "earworm" to sink its hook into you. Think of yourself watching a movie as a primed canvas – painters, this is probably pretty easy considering you're currently smothered in what seems to be the entire contents of your paint tubes. The music just sticks easier, and holds faster.

So, The Soundtrack Syndrome doesn't seem all that farfetched when you think of it in these terms. Go back to "The Perks of Being A Wallflower", to the last scene when they're racing down a highway with wind in their perfectly styled faces, and Charlie has just delivered the most incredible quote. "We Are Infinite". And then David Bowie's "Heroes" rises up and begins to play, and that moment and that song – neither has ever felt so epic. Behold the power of using visuals and sounds to support each other, the power of The Soundtrack Syndrome.

Photo by Katie DeMonte

SOUND SESSIONS:
Liam Annis Interviews Musician Ryan Marvin

Q: So let's start off with the basics, give me a short script of who you are?

A: Ryan Leo Marvin, 22, from Portsmouth NH, Boston MA, Tusky/Tuscan, skating, art, cooking.

Q: Are you in school? Where and what do you study?

A: Yeah man! Suffolk University, senior year, business student!

Q: Alright, what is your main passion and goal for life?

A: Music will always be my true passion, it's what feelings sound like. My goal for life is to get people together and see a different world, more connected in a human way, maybe technology can help that!

Q: What is your genre of music? What genres do you see your songs fall under?

A: Ahhh thats hard! I'm kinda soul rap. Hip hop is my genre! My songs could range from hip hop to soul.

Q: How many different albums/mix-tapes do you have out? Or are you more into singles at the moment?

A: So into singles right now and doing a lot of shows before I release another tape but I have about 3 full bodies of work out on the web!

Q: Are you part of a group or clique? What's the name or names?

A: Yeah many! I'm 1/2 the group Black Coffee with Brain Keefe, a producer from RI. I head Lanky Boy Music, my label and I've worked with countless other cliques around the seacoast and Boston area! Def time to branch out!

Q: Are you actively performing your music at venues? Open mic's? When was the last one? How'd it go?

A: Ah yeh! Always, performing is where my soul is at ease and everything seems to go away for me. Everything bad that is in my mind. Last night, I played at the Vans shop in Boston, MA and it was LIT! It went real well man!

Q: What has been your favorite performance thus far?

A: I played a sold out show and rapped right before Lazy Bone one time at the downstairs of Middle East. So many fans were there, it was insane energy!

Q: If you identify as a rapper, what is something you'd like to improve about the persona of a rap artist?

A: I totally ID as a rapper and an artist. Basically, I wanna throw out mad love and positivity and have people say "darn that's a rapper who's not only talking about drugs, I can approach him, I feel safe around him, I wanna be like him."

Q: How has it been being an artist in Boston? Positive? Negative? Successful?

A: Totally goes both ways. Tiny community so the love is very sharp when you're at a venue or with people in the city doing the same thin. Like mad love from a few hundred people, but negative cause there's so few lovers of hip hop here that will listen to UG (underground) hip hop. Most people here that claim they like rap, like pop (rap), not hip hop. That's chill though. I've made a darn successful run during my time here. I love this city and it's giving me love back. Def wanna branch out though and go on an adventure.

Q: Where do you see yourself in a year? How about 5 years?

A: In one year, I'll be in LA doing my thing, doing bigger shows. I know that for a fact, I fall asleep thinking of hip hop and (when I) wake up and it's the first thing on my mind. Music is me, I wouldn't be me without it. In 5 years, Lanky Boys will have apparel lines and skate shoes and mad chillen [sic] positive stuff. I wanna start an empire of just people doing stuff, you know? Like don't be a fan, come join the team, let's change the world slowly and the right way. A movement you know? Something that gives people hope and power.

Q: What, if any, artists do you admire? And what about them is admirable?

A: Locals: Mike Wing, Tim Nihan and ETS. I admire them cause they always bring me up for Boston shows and always keep me motivated. Good people. They are admirable cause they are all popping and staying the same. That's so rad. Fame can mess people up.

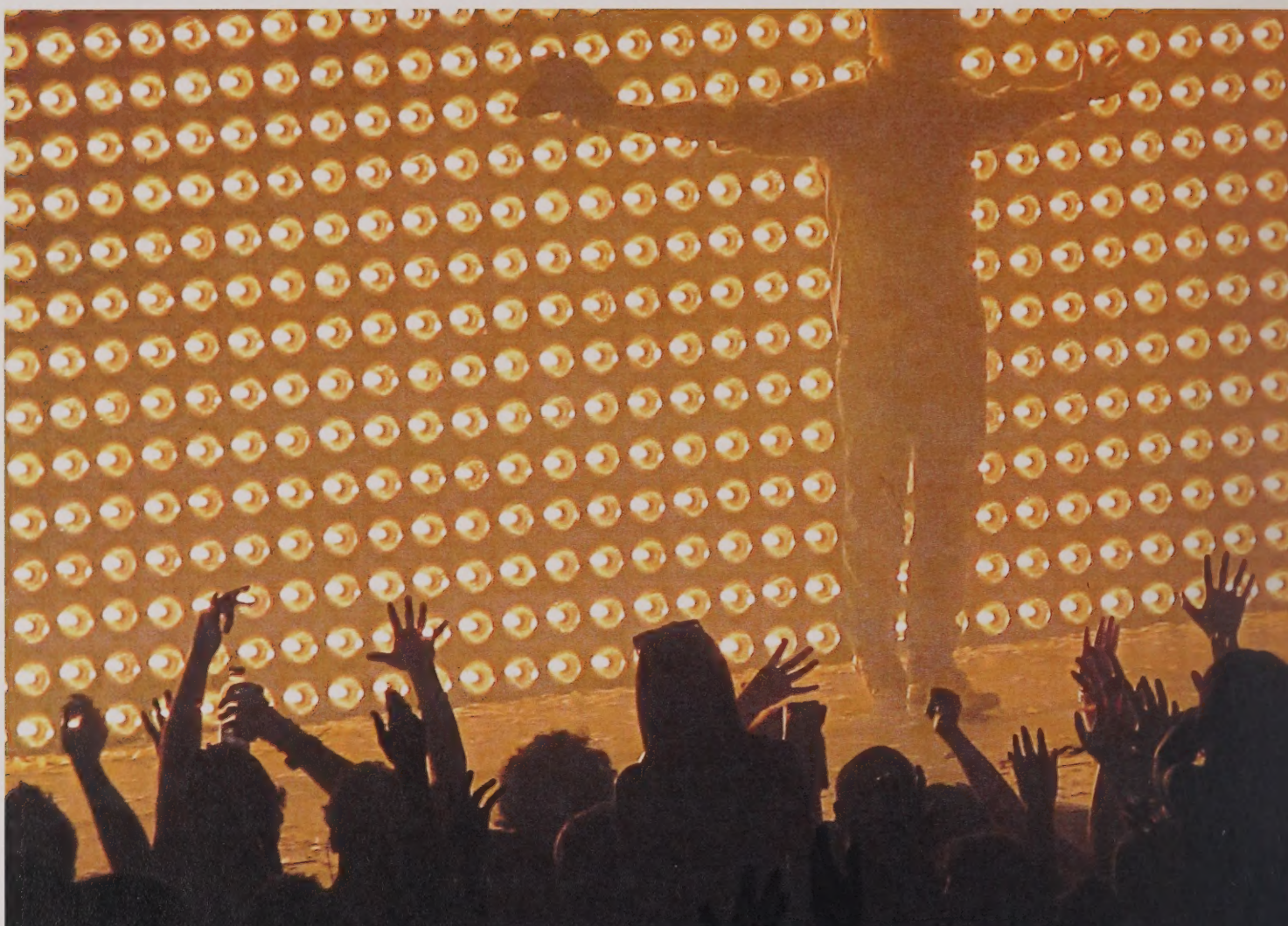
Q: Alright, let's wrap this up. Anything you want people to know about you and your music? Where can people find your stuff? And why should they?

A: My music is an extension of myself and a relatable sound for you to cope with your feelings, or for you to elevate your thinking. I'm just tryna [sic] be the new sound that gets people going. You ever turn on a song and you're just like "Damn, I got this! Imma [sic] go kill it out there!?" That's me. That's what I do for people at live shows and over recordings, man. Currently my "@" for everything is *@odablackwater*. It's some old school name from this Japanese samurai book I read: Oda Nobunaga. I rock with Japan, man! Rad culture. I'm just a kid doing what I love you know? I'm happy. I wanna make other people feel happy too. I'm down to be a role model at some point. I'm all over YouTube and Soundcloud man. They should def check it out because I'll never have a flashy car in my videos or some girl's butt. It's way deeper than that. Hopefully people will hear me keeping it real and they will keep it real and we will see less fights and more loving going on in all neighborhoods all over the world. That's the plan!

Photos by Liam Annis

Q: Any thanks yous?

A: My fam [sic] loves and supports me so much. My friends are lit. We do so much rad stuff. There are too many to shoutout. They skate, they work, they farm, they do awesome things for people and themselves. We're healthy, happy people. We don't talk about people. We kinda just do stuff. There's no time to sit back. The world is turning without us so were turning with it now. My girl man, she's so low key. No one knows I even have a girl. I keep her way away from cameras and BS. She's not about that man. She's just like me. We do stuff. It's crazy to say at 22 but I totally love her.



I would be lying if I said I hated EDM photography. I'd also be lying if I said I loved EDM photography.

EDM, which stands for electronic dance music, is a world on its own. In the past few years, the electronic music industry skyrocketed and is now worth an upwards of $7 billion. Online sales, festival tickets, and venue shows have fans to thank for this growing figure. Festivals and clubs contribute to more than half of the revenue in the industry.

At night, I live a night-crawling double life as a nightlife photographer. I travel along the east coast as a staff photographer for EDMNYC, RAW New York, and as contract photographer for electronic DJ's like Bassnectar and Flosstradamus. I get a unique vantage point of the world of electronic dance music up close, with my camera as my third eye. As fun as it is to be immersed in a convivial atmosphere, the positive and negative aspects of this world constantly contend with each other.

Negative: Great music, awful person.
When I'm contracted, I have the opportunity to get up close and personal with artists. I take photographs that depict musicians in a positive light where they love their fans and seem like awesome people... but often behind the camera, my expectations of them are shattered by their awful, arrogant behavior.

Positive: Plethora of art.
At many of these concerts and festivals, a visual experience is just as important as an aural one. The music is lonely without grandiose lighting set ups, art installations, acrobat arts, extravagant stage design, and costuming. At larger festivals, performance art with extravagant costume design is extremely popular. At both larger and smaller venues, EDM shows push the boundaries for lighting set ups and stage design. Festivals like EDC, Nocturnal Wonderland, and Burning Man invite artists to go wild with their installation concepts and help them make it a reality. EDM events are a breeding ground for artists to play with form, light, and movement.

Dropping the Bass on EDM

Photos and words by Stephanie Chang

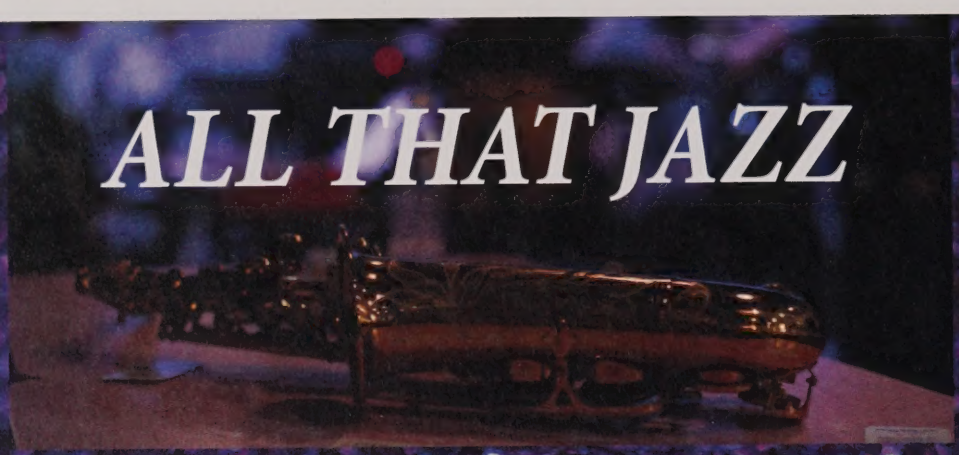
Negative: Drug use.
I can't even count how many times I've feared for concert attendees overdosing. Especially since the era of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," I absolutely understand that music and drugs are now often intertwined, but it blows my mind when people take drugs so lightly and don't take prec autions. People take things without even being informed of what it is, don't stay hydrated, and don't watch out for their friends. One year, when I was shooting Deadmau5's New York tour stop, a candy-flipping teenager, probably 18 or 19, with absurdly dilated pupils, fell to the ground right in front of me and started convulsing. He started foaming from the mouth, cradled himself, and kept saying he was going to die... and that set the tone for the night.

Positive: Sense of community.
EDM definitely gives a very large sense of community. P.L.U.R. or peace, love, unity, and respect is promoted within the culture. You can get as bizarre as possible, wear whatever you want, and the community will accept you. Often when I'm shooting, I see people from all over the world waving flags from different states and countries side by side. From what I've experienced and seen, people are excited to make new friends with common interests and be united by diversity.

Negative: Perceptions of Women.
The woman's "place" in the EDM world is still questionable. Being a male dominated industry, women DJ's are pressured, women in press aren't taken seriously, and in general, women in the industry are judged more by appearance than talent. For female attendees, the issue of "over-sexualization" comes up compared to the male counterparts. Whether you are an attendee or are working at the event itself, you have to deal with uninvited men touching you. The perception for females in the EDM world is that they have no talent and are only there to look pretty. I've met tons of talented women musicians, writers, bloggers, and photographers that have proved otherwise.

Positive: Attending a show or festival is a form of escape/therapy.
Because of the large crowds, diverse people, and decorative environment, attending shows are often forms of therapy. From what I've seen and experienced, a large population of people always have a countdown to their next EDM event that keeps them going. A while ago, there was an online post by the LA based company Insomniac, with images of people in their day job outfits juxtaposed with their festival attire. These are nurses, students, teachers, carpenters, bankers, and people from all different walks of life coming together to be unified by music. It's easy to lose all your inhibitions when you are immersed in loud percussive beats surrounded by people who are doing just the same.

ALL THAT JAZZ

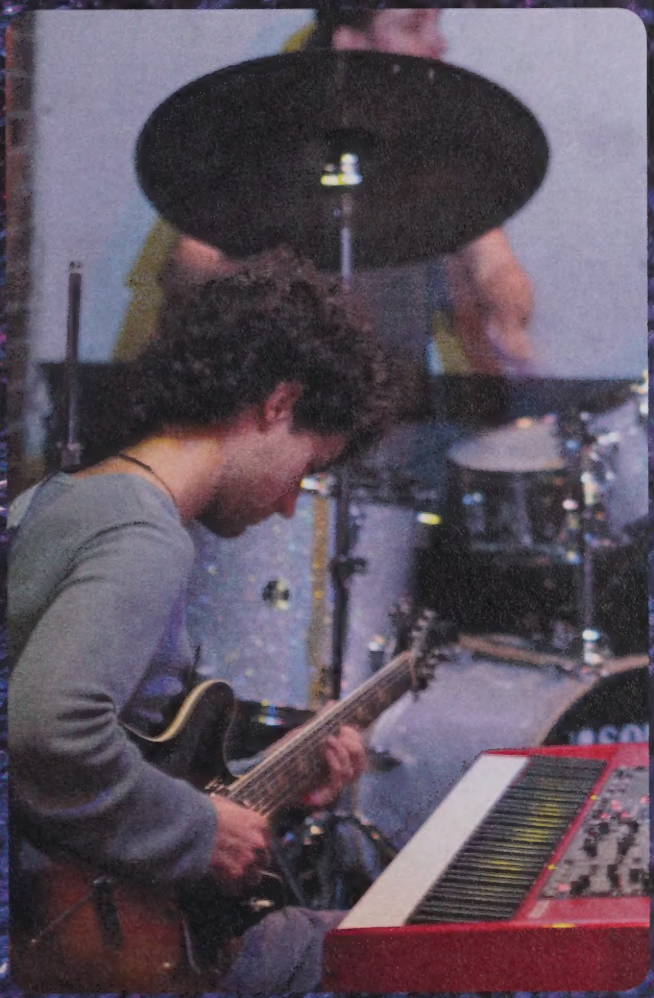


Ashleigh Tait attends the Wally's Café Jam Session

Hidden inside a small café is an amazing community of Jazz musicians and appreciators. Wally's Café, according to the locals is where musicians can collaborate and share their love for music. It gives them an opportunity to meet and play, in a way they couldn't anywhere else. Wally's has an open "Jam Session" every day from 6pm to 9pm, during which a group can coordinate and play together. In this instance,Tomoaki, a musician at Berklee, organized a group of Berklee students to play at Wally's a few times a week. Tomoaki explained "It's mainly the same people each week, this week we have a new drummer". The walls of Wally's are covered in articles about musicians that began their jazz performances there. An article from an old newspaper framed on the wall calls Wally's Café, "The Musicians Training Ground." So next time you're looking for a café atmosphere to listen to some good music accompanied by friendly locals, head to Wally's Café off Mass Avenue, where everyone is welcome.

Photos and words by Ashleigh Tait

EXIT



As a Sparrow Chirps, so Does She

Lena Mirisola goes behind the scenes of local band, As The Sparrow with an intirview from one of its members, Crystal Araiza.

How long have you been playing music? Where did your musical influence come from?

I've been playing my whole life, and my parents were Berklee graduates, so my brothers and I didn't have much choice (we were their spooky experiments).

So you're in a band? Tell me about it!

I've been playing in As The Sparrow for roughly four years now. We are an 8 piece band-- two fiddles, a trumpet, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, bass, drums, and a singer. Initially, we began as a folk band but as members keep switching, so did our overall sound. Now we're classified as folk swing/folk rock/indie rock, idk!!!! There are just so many ways to be these days, haha. I bounce around from instrument to instrument but I'm always singing. In the past I've done banjo, piano, flute, ukulele, and bass when we were down a member. As The Sparrow didn't begin as mine, it was Mark's (frontman guitarist/ vocalist) band - I joined really when I was a kid and we kind of grew up together in sorts and now we co-write!

What makes ATS unique for the Boston music scene, and what makes it fit in?

We've got a lot of members, like a lot, like sound guys start sweating when we walk into a venue. How we fit in, that's easy: we are dreaming the same dream as anyone else in the music scene.

How has your music influenced your art, or vice versa?

I make music when I'm sad and I make visual art when I'm happy. I don't know why it's like this, but it's something I've noticed and I'm grateful to have outlets regardless of how I'm feeling.

Has your artistic talent helped you as a musician?

I do most of our band art - flyers, cds, album stuff, t-shirts, fun stuff. This definitely helped me network and was a segway into a lot of the other work I received from bands.

What are some ways you've married art making into music making?

I relate color to music; they actually behave very similarly. Quick run down: An octave in music is divided into 12 half steps; really there exists an infinite number of pitches in an octave, but if we went any smaller than 12 it would be hard for our ears to distinguish. The same goes with colors: there are an infinite amount of hues within our spectrum, but we divide them into red, orange, yellow, etc because we simply can't name every color. And from that, you can draw relations between color harmonies and chords. For instance: complementary colors, directly across from each other on the color wheel, clash the most, are true opposites. The tritone, or the diminished fifth, is music's equivalent-- it's exactly halfway between an octave and when played with the octave, it is thought to be the most dissonant chord. Back in the day it was known as the devil's chord and was actually punishable - users of the interval were excommunicated by the church.

Tell us a wild tour story.

First tour we ever went on, we're in this sketchy yellow van with no windows, mismatched seats that we put in the day before, annnnd the brakes stop working. It's the dead of winter. The next evening we get to our venue in New York, our trumpet player, Leo, opens his case, and what's not there, but his trumpet. He had one job. So he phones up a rental store in the area which was closing at the time, puts on some theatrics and they agree to stay open so he can grab a rental. Crisis averted.

What's the most rewarding thing about being in a band?

They're honestly my second family, I can go to them for anything.

What's the hardest / most aggravating thing about being in a band, especially one so large?

Coordinating practices.... Mark is a wizard when it comes

to making sure we are all down to make shows, I don't think I could handle that responsibility.

What's the best way to support a small, local band?

Get out of your apartment and go to shows! 90% of life is showing up.

How many tats are you rocking?

FOUR -- a girly moon, some eyes on the back of my neck to keep an eye on you, a dragon, and a beetlejuice tramp stamp.

Favorite venue / type of venue to play at?

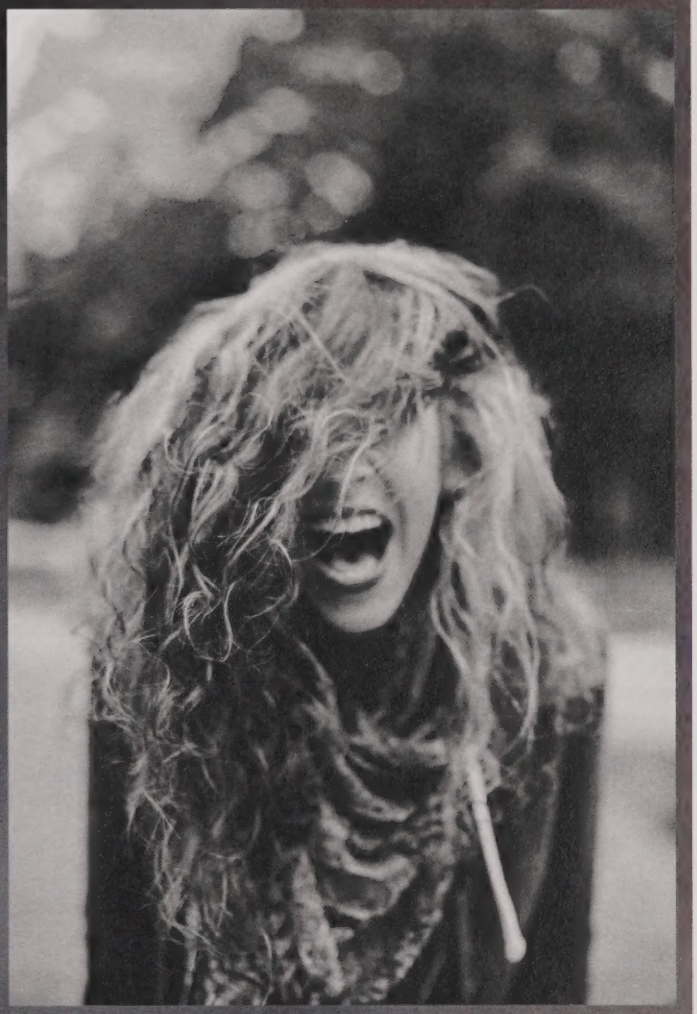
Basements are great. I miss the Precinct in Cambridge, though - it was this divey little bar with nothing really exceptional or special about it, besides the fact we used to play there often. It just kind of felt like the end of an era when it shut down.

Give us two random things we should know about you.

I hate condiments except syrup and I have perfect pitch!

What are three bands we should be listening to right now?

Caravan Palace, Andrew Jackson Jihad, and keep it classy with some Mingus.



"I make music when I'm sad and I make visual art when I'm happy. I don't know why it's like this, but it's something I've noticed and I'm grateful to have outlets regardless of how I'm feeling."

Be sure to check out As The Sparrow's music on www.asthesparrow.com !

Vol I · Issue V · MMXV